

Englisia MAY 2014
VOL. 1 NO.2, 297-307

THE INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE USE AND LANGUAGE ATTITUDE ON THE MAINTENANCE OF COMMUNITY LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY MIGRANT STUDENTS

Leni Amelia Suek

Universitas Nusa Cendana Kupang, NTT

ABSTRACT

The maintenance of community languages of migrant students is heavily determined by language use and language attitudes. The superiority of a dominant language over a community language contributes to attitudes of migrant students toward their native languages. When they perceive their native languages as unimportant language, they will reduce the frequency of using that language even though at home domain. Solutions provided for a problem of maintaining community languages should be related to language use and attitudes of community languages, which are developed mostly in two important domains, school and family. Hence, the valorization of community language should be promoted not only in family but also school domains. Several programs such as community language school and community language program can be used for migrant students to practice and use their native languages. Since educational resources such as class session, teachers and government support are limited; family plays significant roles to stimulate positive attitudes toward community language and also to develop the use of native languages.

Keywords: Language use, language attitude, community language, language maintenance migrant students.

INTRODUCTION

Due to the demand of globalization where communication across nations and cultures are significantly increasing, the use of English as a medium of world-

wide communication is also getting higher. One of the implications of globalization is migration of people from one country to another. The migration does not just have significant impacts on economics and politics but also to language and cultural issues.

Being immigrants means being bilinguals or multilinguals; and those who speak two languages or more have certain attitudes to languages that they speak. When they speak the languages, they also carry either positive or negative attitudes toward their native languages, first languages, or second languages. Language use and attitude have certain impacts on the maintenance of their native languages or community languages.

It was estimated that there are around 6000 languages spoken worldwide; unfortunately, half of them are in a state of loss (Krauss, 1992; Mackey, 1991; Moseley & Asher, 1994; Wurm, 1996). This language loss is caused by less preservation of the languages. The process of language loss is getting rapid when the owners of the languages are reluctant to use the languages. In order to inhibit this process, certain actions should be taken. In this paper, community languages refer to native languages or first languages of migrants who live and study in English speaking countries.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the influence of language use and language attitudes on the maintenance of community languages. In addition, recommendation and solution on how to promote maintenance of community languages will be elaborated. Those solutions will be supported by theories and research presented in literature review section. Some research on language use, language attitudes, and maintenance of community languages will be included as theoretical foundations.

Contexts of the problems

It is argued that social psychological factors influence language behavior (Lawson, 2004). Those who are bilinguals or multilinguals have to make a certain decision on what language they should speak when they attend a conversation. This

decision is made by referring to social factors such as topics of conversation and interlocutors, and also psychological factors such as their perceived identity and attitude to the language. Other factors such as their language competence and degree of contact with people who speak the languages also influence the decision-making.

Research in English speaking countries shows that migrant students have a propensity to speak in English than their mother tongues because of language competence, language use, domain of conversation, perceived identity, degree of contact (Lawson, 2004). In addition, it is commonly a case that second language is more dominant than first language of students who are coming from minority language background (Riagain, 2008). Society perception on community languages contributes to the formation of attitudes of the speakers of those languages. If the society has positive attitudes on community languages, the native speakers of those languages feel accepted in the society; consequently, they feel allowed to speak the languages. It is asserted that, intrinsically, there is nothing in a language that makes it superior or inferior (Hamers & Blanc, 2005) because language attitude depends on social judgment (Riagain, 2008; Tse, 2000).

When community languages are not valued, one of the disadvantages of being bilingual or multilingual is the minimal use of and also negative attitudes toward their native languages, which contributes to language loss. The maintenance of the languages is a challenging task because this requires government, education and family support. The problem is that how to maintain community languages in relation to language use and language attitudes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted to provide empirical evidences that language use, language attitudes, and language maintenance have sound relation. School and families are mentioned as two key domains to promote the maintenance of community languages.

Lawson conducted two series of study to find out the influence of social psychological factors on the multilingual behavior of second-generation adolescents of Sylheti-Bangladeshi origin living in London (2004). The first study was conducted to

reveal the pattern of language use of those Sylheti-Bangladeshi students. The results show that English was used at most in all domains except family or home with all interlocutors except older relatives. Bengali was moderately used and unfortunately Sylheti, which is their native language, was rarely used. It was also reported that code mixing happened in all domains except with older relatives. The second study provides a rationale why English was used in most of the domains. The result reveals that because of their competence in English is higher than Bengali and Sylheti, they preferred to speak English in most of the occasions. In addition, the observation indicated that contact with English speakers is higher than speakers of Bengali and Sylheti, language vitality of English is greater than Bengali and Sylheti, and English and Bengali were more important to their group identity than Sylheti. Sociolinguistic aspects such setting, topic, interlocutor; and social psychological variables such language competence, degree of contact, perceived identity, language vitality, influences language behavior. In relation to maintenance of community languages, this study provides an evidence that language use of their community language is lesser than English as a dominant language. This is because they only use the language at home particularly when they speak to elderly. In terms of language attitude, they do not perceive their mother tongue, Sylheti, as unimportant language to their group identity.

Another study on language use revealed that the pattern of language use is frequently determined by dominant language group, because it is required for social and economic development (Riagain, 2008). In addition, it is asserted that schooling affects the use of community languages. Since English was the only language in the classroom, their proficiency of community languages is gradually decreasing (Taumoefolau, Starks, Davis, & Bell, 2002). Even, at home which is a primary domain where community language is maintained, the migrants students sometimes do code mixing or even respond in English. In relation to problem discussed in this paper, schools play significant roles in promoting maintenance of community languages.

Besides school and society judgment, in his study, Pauwels discussed the role of the family in maintaining the community languages (2005). She argued that family is a cornerstone for the acquisition and also maintenance of community lan-

guages in Australia (Pauwels, 2005). There are several challenges faced by family in maintaining the community languages such as proficiency of community languages particularly the second-generation parents, the amount of effort in devoted to maintain the language, and community attitudes toward language maintenance (Pauwels, 2005). However, she also mentioned some successful strategies that can be applied to maintain the community languages. Those strategies include persistence of use, consistency of language use and also parental use of teaching and learning technique.

Solutions and recommendations

Minimal maintenance of community languages will lead to language loss and language shift. It is argued that there is a potential shift in the languages toward the language of dominant culture after couple of years (Taumoefolau et al., 2002). Studies show that community is actually aware of language loss of their community languages and they want to keep the languages alive (Lawson, 2004; Taumoefolau et al., 2002). Hence, actions should be taken to maintain the community languages.

It is argued that the maintenance of language is heavily determined by language use and attitudes. The language use increases when positive attitudes toward the language is developed, and this leads to language maintenance (Choi, 2003). Therefore, solutions provided for a problem of maintenance of community languages should be related to language use and attitudes of community languages. The development of language use of community language and positive attitudes on native languages occurs mostly in two important domains, school and family. Hence, the solution of the problem of maintenance of community language in relation to language use and attitude should be provided in a basis of those two domains.

The preservation of community languages can be conducted through education (Clyne, Hunt, & Isaakidis, 2004; Li, 2006). It is argued that the higher the language competence, the higher the language use (Lawson, 2004). Language competence of community languages can be gained through community language program. Community language schools are apparently one of the best places to provide huge opportunity for bilingual or multilingual children to learn their native

languages. Even though the role and position of community languages are still uncertain and vulnerable, this after-hour language schools can be a solution to maintain community languages because these schools are places where they can learn not only their mother tongue but also the culture (Cardona, Noble, & Biase, 2008). For example in Australia, these schools offer 47 languages for more than 32000 students who also enrolled in more than 400 schools in New South Wales. In addition, these community language schools are recognized and also funded by NSW Community Languages School Board (Cardona et al., 2008). These schools conduct the classes at local primary schools in the area and operate after school hours on weekdays or Saturdays.

Beside community language schools, language education program, pre-school language nest and bilingual programs can places for migrant students to learn their native languages (Lao, 2004; Taumoevalau et al., 2002). In New Zealand, there are several pacific language education programs in certain regions. In addition, there are also pre-school nests and bilingual programs of four largest Pasifika languages (Taumoevalau et al., 2002). These language education programs are operated to function as domain to practice and learn community languages in New Zealand. This is important because those languages are currently in a state of gradual loss.

Since the maintenance of native languages cannot merely relied on school-based programs, practicing those languages at home domain is a crucial factor. It is argued that linguists should take certain actions to prevent loss of community languages (Lao, 2004). However, native speakers themselves are the key actors of maintaining their own languages. This is because the linguists' role is to conduct research and reveal the results as a theoretical foundation to solve the challenges in maintaining community languages. The action itself should be taken by the owner of the community languages. In this case, parents have significant contributions to promote the use of their native languages to their children. At home, they need to speak in their mother tongue (Cardona et al., 2008; Tse, 2000). However, sometime parents do not really preserve the languages by allowing the children to speak in dominant languages at home. Some suggestion proposed by (Lao, 2004) that parents can develop their children literacy of mother tongue since early childhood.

In addition, strategies proposed by Pauwels (2005) are valuable, for example, parents need to develop persistency and consistency in using the community languages in their daily conversations at home. Parents should strict to the rule that their children should speak in their mother tongue at home. Teaching and learning techniques also can be used to teach their children the native languages. Modeling and rehearsing is two keys factors contribute to the development of language use and attitudes. Parents might make the process of practicing and using language in a more motivating ways by introducing word games, providing storybooks, interactive videos or computer games. In addition, for parents who do not speak the native languages fluently because they are the second or third generation of the tribe, they can take several actions, such as asking native people to teach their children or they can learn the native languages together (Lao, 2004).

The degree of contact to the speakers of community languages needs to be increased in order to develop the use of community languages. One of the reason why English is dominant than community languages is because the migrant students of the language have less contact with the speakers of their native languages (Lawson, 2004). In school they always speak in English while they do not have huge opportunity to practice their community languages either at home or other domains. Besides attending community language schools, certain events or regions can be created to gather people to speak community languages on a regular basis inside and outside home. In New Zealand, the area of Manukau is called “linguistic enclave”, this is a place where those who are coming from same ethnicity meet and speak their community languages (Taumoefolau et al., 2002). This provides an opportunity for migrant students to practice their language outside home. This also develops their sense of belonging to their community languages that may lead to the development of positive attitudes to those languages. This is a key factor to promote the maintenance of community languages by providing opportunity to use the language.

Those solutions and recommendations given above are well supported but also have certain limitations. Community language schools or community language programs may face challenges like fund, teachers, resources, and infrastructures. At home, there are some parents who might have lack of awareness of the importance

of maintenance of their native languages. In addition, pressures from the society who reject the use of community languages in public domain as well as the negative attitudes of the community toward the community languages are also problematic. Parents also might not persistent and consistent in assisting their children to use their community languages. Loss of community language is inevitably; however, those recommendations have been proven to be effective measures to at least halt down the process of language loss (Cardona et al., 2008; Pauwels, 2005; Taumoefolau et al., 2002).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, being bilinguals or multilinguals does not only have positive but negative sides as well. One of the negative sides is lacking of the maintenance of the community languages. This is due to insufficient use of the languages and negative attitudes toward the languages. The maintenance of community languages is heavily determined by language use and language attitudes of people who speak the language. The dominance of dominant language over community language contributes to attitudes of migrant students toward their native languages. When they perceive their native languages as unimportant language, they will reduce the frequency of using that language even though at home domain. Hence, the valorization of community language should be promoted not only in family but also school domains. Several programs such as community language school and community language program can be places for migrant students to practice and use their native languages. Since educational resources such as class session, teachers and government support are limited; family plays significant roles to stimulate positive attitudes toward community language and also to develop the use of native languages.

REFERENCES

- Cardona, B., Noble, G., & Biase, B. D. (2008). Community languages matter: Challenges and opportunities facing the community languages program in New South Wales. Penrith South: The University of Western Sydney.
- Choi, J. K. (2003). Language attitudes and the future bilingualism: the case of Paraguay. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 6(2), 81-94.
- Clyne, M., Hunt, C. R., & Isaakidis, T. (2004). Learning a community language as a third language. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 1(1), 33-52.
- Hamers, J. F., & Blanc, M. H. A. (2005). *Bilinguality and Bilingualism*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press.
- Krauss, M. (1992). The world's languages in crisis. *Language*, 68(1), 6-10.
- Lao, C. (2004). Parents' attitudes toward Chinese-English Bilingual education and Chinese-language use. *Bilingual Research Journal: the Journal of the National Association for Bilingual Education*, 28(1), 99-121.
- Lawson, S. (2004). Identity, language use, and attitudes some Sylheti-Bangladeshi data from London, UK. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 23(1), 49-69.
- Li, W. (2006). Complementary schools, past, present and future. *Language Education*, 20(1), 76-83.
- Mackey, W. F. (1991). Language diversity, language policy and sovereign state. *History of European Ideas*, 13(1), 51-61.
- Moseley, C., & Asher, R. E. (1994). *Atlas of the World's Languages*. London: Routledge.
- Pauwels, A. (2005). Maintaining the community language in Australia: Challenges and Roles for Families. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 8(2), 124-131.
- Riagain, P. O. (2008). Language attitudes and minority languages. In J. Cenoz & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Language and Education* (Vol. 6, pp. 329-341): Springer science+Business media LLC.
- Taumoefolau, M., Starks, D., Davis, K., & Bell, A. (2002). Linguists and Language Maintenance: Pasifika Languages in Manukau, New Zealand. *Oceanic Linguistics*, 41(1), 15-27.

- Tse, L. (2000). The Effects of Ethnic Identity Formation on Bilingual Maintenance and Development: an Analysis of Asian American Narratives. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 3(3), 185-200.
- Wurm, S. A. (1996). *Atlas of the World's Languages in danger in Disappearing*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.